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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [AS](#)
SUBJECT: AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC SUPPORT WANES ON AFGHANISTAN

Classified By: Political Counselor James F. Cole for reasons 1.4(b)(d)

¶1. (U) In a Newspan poll conducted March 20-22, 2009, 65 percent of Australians do not support sending more Australian troops if asked by the U.S. Current results show a steady decline in support for Australian troops in Afghanistan from a high of 66 percent of voters in favor of sending troops in the initial 2001 poll. Poll results were predictably split along political party lines, with 65 percent of left-leaning Labor voters opposed to troop increases vice 55 percent of voters from the Liberal and other parties who have traditionally supported troop increases. Liberal Party leaders, while claiming to not make partisan politics over Afghanistan as Labor did over Iraq, called on PM Rudd to provide Australians with a "full explanation of the strategic reasoning for any expansion of their mission".

¶2. (C/NF) COMMENT: The latest poll results - a dramatic decline from the 2001 poll and likened to the downward trend of public support seen for Iraq - puts additional pressure on the Rudd government to redefine Australia's strategic intent in Afghanistan. The decline in public support follows two recent fatalities within the past week, bringing Australia's total combat losses to ten. PM Rudd's continuing high popularity with the voters puts him a good position to commit additional resources, however. End comment.

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